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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the cognitive effect of a highly successful 1985 British television program, "Edge of Darkness," which was viewed by millions and received critical plaudits and the accolade of the industry itself. The program is shown to represent a significant television event for formal and cognitive reasons that can usefully be related to the politics of television fiction and postmodern culture. Before describing the program in detail, the relevance of situating it within this broader framework is outlined, i.e., how cognition works in relation to the story's discursive process. The specific qualities of Edge of Darkness are clarified by considering the text itself and why and how it was made. The program is identified as postmodernist stylistically because it: (1) moved to and fro between the logic of realism/naturalism and a kind of modernist reflexivity; (2) explored complex psychic and political depths; (3) dealt with the concept of mapping; and (4) wove a number of themes (the "back story") into an engaging fiction. The knowledge and understanding the program generated is analyzed by situating the text in its contexts of consumption and production. It is concluded that the goal of the program--consciousness raising--was achieved, although any sense the fiction makes to television viewers is conversely viewed as tenuous. (67 notes and references) (CGD)

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THE COGNITIVE DIMENSION -'EDGE OF DARKNESS'

Jim McGuigan

Paper Presented to the 1986 International Television Studies Conference

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THE COGNITIVE DIMENSION - 'EDGE OF DARKNESS'

'I always imagined a merry-go-round with this man standing at the centre, bewildered by a kaleidoscope of figures and events, none of whom he really knows or necessarily understands...'

Martin Campbell, director of Edge of Darkness[1]

A Television Event

Edge of Darkness is a six part television serial that was first transmitted in Britain by BBC2 on Mondays at 9.25pm from 4 November to 9 December 1985. Ten days after the final episode, it was repeated by BBC1 in double parts of two hour duration stripped across three consecutive evenings.[2] The average audience for the original broadcast was four million and for the repeat eight million.[3] In spite of its politically controversial subject matter and stylistic peculiarities, Edge of Darkness was received very favourably indeed by television previewers and reviewers in mainstream newspapers and magazines, with just one notable exception.[4] In March 1986, it won four BAFTA awards - for drama series/serial (Michael Wearing and Martin Campbell), photography (Andrew Dunn), original music (Eric Clapton and Michael Kamen), and actor (Bob Peck). Joe Don Baker and Joanne Whalley were also nominated for acting awards. Although he was praised generally for writing a brilliant script, Troy Kennedy Martin was not among the award winners on that occasion.

These bald facts - the rapid and record-breaking repeat, the critical plaudits and the accolade of the industry itself - probably justify a serious consideration of what was so special about Edge of Darkness but they do not, however, constitute the main reasons for my interest in it. Apart from the obvious success, Edge of Darkness represents a significant television event for formal and cognitive reasons that can usefully be related to the politics of television fiction and postmodern culture. Before discussing Edge of Darkness in detail, then, I shall outline the relevance of situating it within this broader framework.

Politics/Television/Fiction

It is worth recalling why dramatic fiction in British television has been the focus of intense political debate over the years. From the mid-1960s to the late-1970s a great deal of theoretical and practical effort was put into making television fiction more 'progressive'.[5] The relative merits of different forms - naturalism, realism, modernism - were disputed fiercely;

rarely, it must be said, in the belief that the 'correct' form would achieve immediate behavioural and social effects but on the assumption that formal strategies are intimately connected to cognition - ways of understanding and making sense of the world. As Michael Wearing, the producer of Edge of Darkness, put it, the purpose of such a programme is 'consciousness-raising'; to bring to public awareness important issues that are normally distorted or neglected by television. Throughout the 1960s and '70s 'serious' television drama, in particular, sometimes functioned as an officially licensed site for alternative and oppositional representations,[6] something which conservatives frequently complained about.[7] In recent years the grounds of contestation have changed markedly because of a general shift to the right in society[8] and because of institutional closure and fragmentation in television.[9]

Back in 1964, Troy Kennedy Martin initiated the form/cognition debate with his celebrated attack on television drama for mediating the world mainly through dialogue, for slavishly observing natural time and for reproducing the static conventions of naturalistic theatre.[10] He advocated the alternative techniques of fast cut action sequences, temporal distortion and so on, deriving from Hollywood cinema and popular American television series like Highway Patrol.[11] Around the same time, and for similar reasons, Tony Garnett and Ken Loach were appropriating essentially Italian neo-realist techniques for documentary style dramas like Cathy Come Home (1966), shot on 16mm film.[12] Working with John McGrath on Z Cars (1961-), Kennedy Martin had already sought a kind of heightened televisual realism. Subsequently, they experimented with modernist conventions in the little remembered Diary of a Young Man (1965). Both later wrote cinema scripts and McGrath founded the 7.84 Theatre Company. The 1974 Play for Today adaptation of 7.84's The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil was an extraordinary synthesis of television drama with political theatre. It has since acquired the unfortunate reputation of an apparently unsurpassable text of progressive television.[13]

During the 1970s, debate centred on whether a realist intent necessarily led to a passifyingly naturalistic result. In theoretical discourse, Colin MacCabe collapsed realism into naturalism by claiming that 'the classic realist text', said to be ubiquitous across an enormous range of forms and media, was by definition incapable of representing real contradictions due to its empiricism even when used for progressive purposes by Garnett and Loach.[14] He advocated a radical modernist alternative along the lines of Godard's and Gorin's film Tout Va Bien.[15] The impact of such theorising was minimal on actual television production, although it held some sway with students of the media for a while.

Against MacCabe's formalist conflation, Raymond Williams insisted on the Marxist distinction between naturalism and realism: a distinction between surface and depth, between stasis and movement. Naturalism only describes everyday appearances whereas realism goes beneath the surface to explore underlying social structures and processes in whatever particular historical form it takes.[16] Williams's argument can be used to support two quite different variants of oppositional television in the 1970s: the Lukacsian realism associated with the work of Trevor Griffiths[17] and John McGrath's Brecht-inspired modernism.[18] McGrath was just as keen as Griffiths to show things as they are, or have been and might be. For example, The Cheviot... analyses Scottish history through the dual prism of theatrical alienation devices and television documentary techniques.[19] Such realist intent in radical art has been criticised, however, on theoretical grounds from a politically sympathetic position by Terry Lovell.

In her book Pictures of Reality, Lovell argues that it is a recurrent mistake of Marxist cultural theory and practice to assume that a commitment to knowing the world in order to change it necessarily implies that it should, therefore, be represented truthfully in art. She points to the 'extra-cognitive dimensions' of art that are insufficiently recognised by realist aesthetics: art plays on the emotions, it offers pleasure and it may invoke utopianism.[20] This kind of reasoning has contributed to a major shift in the political analysis of television fiction since the 1970s.

At the 1977 Edinburgh International Television Festival, Lovell herself, Richard Dyer and Jean McCrindle put the case for switching attention away from the formal/cognitive aspects of 'serious' drama towards an engagement with 'popular' television and, particularly, Coronation Street, then the most watched programme. The gathering of mainly television professionals was stunned by what seemed at the time to be a perverse academic project (even to me, who was there). Dyer, Lovell and McCrindle began by attacking the male domination of the Television Festival, not only in terms of participation but also in terms of the issues being discussed at other sessions.[21] This related directly to the feminist concerns of their paper:

'We are trying to analyse the ways in which representations of women in soap opera reproduce and reinforce the subordination of women in contemporary society and to explore possible strategies for women directors and writers struggling in their work against the prevailing sexism of the media'.22

They also distanced themselves from the modernist critique of realism:

'...anti-realism too easily slides over into hostility to all or most popular forms and conventions. We wanted to study soap opera because it is popular, it is for and about women, it is not prestigious and we wanted to discover why it gives pleasure to millions of people and to relate that to its ideological effects'.23

Two other issues raised by Dyer, Lovell and McCrindle indicated fresh ways of studying television. First, that we know very little about how audiences actually 'read' television and how programmes are watched differently by men and women.[24] At best, orthodox audience research only scratches the surface, telling us virtually nothing about complex processes of identification, pleasure and understanding. Also, the text itself is insufficient evidence of, say, a programme's 'progressiveness'. When we engage in textual analysis our inferences about reading must be constantly open to sociological doubt. Second, that the value of a programme like Coronation Street should not be judged on whether it represents social reality truthfully or falsely but on how it activates utopian wishes for emotional intensity, honest relationships and a sense of community.[25]

The 1977 intervention by Dyer, Lovell and McCrindle is extremely important to remember because it challenged the cognitive emphasis in television fiction debates hitherto and because it was an intellectually postmodernist 'move'.[26] They shifted attention from a politics of knowledge production towards a politics of pleasurable consumption and, partially, from a Marxist to a feminist frame of analysis. Their intervention was postmodern in a local rather than epochal sense in that it reflected loss of faith in the strategy of defamiliarising television with maximalist forays into production and it was a rapprochement with naturalism/realism, though not on cognitive grounds. Thus, a certain aesthetic populism was announced which has guided much British television study ever since.

Postmodernism/Cognitive Mapping

I have just invoked the concept of postmodernism without explaining properly what I mean by it. To do so requires a momentary detour away from television fiction and into the realms of sociological theorising. 'Postmodernism' or 'the postmodern' are terms which are now being used outside their narrower meanings in architectural discourse to theorise current transformations in 'Western' culture and society. I don't intend to delve very deeply into this new intellectual craze. But I do think that the question of postmodernism is relevant to analysing Edge of Darkness, which at the risk of taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut I want to argue is a postmodern text with a progressive cognitive dimension.

The sociology of 'post-industrialism' and 'post-capitalism'[27] is being appropriated by theorists on the left to account for the impact of information technologies and modern media systems on the social structures and cultural formations of advanced non-communist societies.[28] However, it is not necessary

to accept, as some left theorists do, the ideological assumption built into this American-originated sociology that a tendential shift from manufacturing to service work and the spread of computerisation and audio-visual communication eclipse the capitalist mode of production as classically understood. After all, capitalism is a set of persistent social relations of exploitation and domination as well as a set of productive forces.[29] Nevertheless, something is happening which calls into question any narrowly economistic or nationalistic way of thinking about capitalism and its contradictions. In effect, capitalism is renewing on an intensely global scale with dramatic consequences for forms of consciousness at every level.

Fredric Jameson argues persuasively that 'postmodernism' is 'the cultural logic of late capitalism'. It is becoming the 'hegemonic norm' of a transnational social order.[30] Drawing on Ernest Mandel's Marxist economics,[31] Jameson constructs a socio-cultural periodisation, whereby realism is said to correspond in some complex way with market capitalism and steam power; modernism with monopoly capitalism, electric and combustion power; and, postmodernism with multinational capitalism, electronic and nuclear power. At face value such a scheme of historical stages is reductionist but it does have the distinct virtue of materialising the hypothesis that postmodernism may be of epochal and not just local stylistic significance.

So, postmodernism is a periodising concept for our time. According to Jameson, its cultural manifestations are:

'...a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary "theory" and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality, whose "schizophrenic" structure (following Lacan) will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships in the more temporal arts; a whole new type of emotional ground tone - what I will call "intensities" - which can best be grasped by a return to older theories of the sublime; the deep constitutive relationships of all this to a whole new technology, which is itself a figure for a whole new economic world system...'.[32]

I shall concentrate here on just three aspects of postmodernism: the reaction against high modernism, the rejection of the depth model of reality, and the delight and terror in free-floating images shorn of solid historical reference.

The reaction against high modernism is partly due to the collapse of the high/mass culture barrier. Jameson discusses this as an intellectual fascination with popular cultural forms that were formerly despised.[33] Of at least equal importance, though, is the incorporation of what was previously resistant and unpopular about modernism into the circuit of mass distribution forms and media. John Wyver has observed that it is difficult to talk about postmodernist television since there is no really established tradition of

modernist television.[34] This is only true up to a point, as Wyver himself recognises, since adverts and pop videos, in particular, regularly deploy modernist codes but in what might be considered a conservative way - a postmodern way? The critical assumption that the main ideological effect of television is to naturalise culture and to render an illusion of reality must now be revised, as Umberto Eco's distinction between 'Paleo-TV' and 'Neo-TV' suggests:

'The principal characteristic of Neo-TV is that it talks less and less about the external world. Whereas Paleo-TV talked about the external world, or pretended to, Neo-TV talks about itself and about the contact that it establishes with its own public'.35

It is not only mainstream programmes that are obsessed with television. Think of the 'code comedies' from Monty Python through to Spitting Image where television becomes the subject and object of itself. But with the proliferation of channels and the increasingly widespread use of video recorders the consequences are greater than can be encapsulated by referring to the formal operations of any particular programme category:

'...one can spend 48 hours a day in front of the TV, so there's no more need to come into contact with that remote fiction - the real world...Now unreality is within everyone's grasp'.36

Unlike the aspirations of both classical realism and high modernism before it, postmodernism does not pursue 'truth', whether conceived in epistemological or artistic terms. Jameson points out that this is a feature of contemporary theory a la Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva et al as well as of popular culture. What he calls 'the depth model of reality'[37] - the distinctions between 'inside' and 'outside' (expressionism), 'essence' and 'appearance' (Hegelian dialectics), 'latent' and 'manifest' (Freudian psychoanalysis), 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity' (Sartrean existentialism), 'signified' and 'signifier' (Saussurean linguistics) - is eliminated from the postmodern game of shifting signifiers and shifty subjects. There they sit now on the bench - Munch, Hegel, Freud, Sartre, Saussure, Levi-Strauss and Marx - a motley team of once great modern players.

Following Jean Baudrillard, Jameson dubs postmodernism 'the culture of the simulacrum',[38] a network of unstable images, self-referential forms and styles. Trying to make sense of the youth magazine The Face, Dick Hebdige distinguishes between the logocentric 'first world' and this 'second world' where the visual image prevails over the word. There:

'...the hierarchical ranking of word and image has been abolished. Truth - insofar as it exists at all - is first and foremost pictured: embodied in images which have their own power and effects. Looking takes precedence over seeing ("sensing" over "knowing"). Words are pale ("speculative") facsimiles of an original reality which is directly apprehensible through Image. This reality is as thin as the paper it is printed on. There is nothing behind the Image and hence there is no hidden Truth to be revealed'.39

Hebdige is simultaneously fascinated and repelled by the postmodern world of The Face. It's where the action is but it's also disturbingly nihilistic. He believes that words like 'love', 'hate', 'faith', 'history', 'pain', 'joy', 'passion' and 'compassion' will always return to haunt this morally vacuous world.[40] Thus, Hebdige's answer to the question posed by postmodernism is essentially moralistic. For Jameson, such an answer is no answer at all:

'...if postmodernism is a historical phenomenon, then the attempt to conceptualize it in terms of moral or moralizing judgements must finally be identified as a category-mistake'.41

To oppose postmodernism at the cultural level would be rather like opposing the micro-computer at the level of technology, yet it is dangerous to succumb uncritically to its elusive charms. It needs to be thought both positively and negatively, as Hebdige and Jameson try to do in their different ways. Like the culture of early-nineteenth century capitalism, postmodernism may be a revolutionary force but at the expense of personal and social turmoil. This is a culture in which you can very easily get lost. To take one of Jameson's examples, you can enter the Bonaventura Hotel in Los Angeles and never find your way out again. As you move imperceptibly between the various levels it becomes increasingly difficult to locate terra firma outside. If you're rich enough there is pleasure to be had; but how do you orient yourself in a place like that? According to Jameson, we need maps.

Jameson's answer to the question of postmodernism is a cognitive and political one. He calls for a recovery of the didactic aspect of oppositional art and culture. From classical times through to the twentieth century tension in left cultural politics represented by the alternative positions of Bertolt Brecht and Gyorgy Lukacs art was frequently thought of as somehow pedagogic.[42] Bourgeois romanticism, high modernism and now postmodernism seem to deny art such a function. To escape quietism and moralising, Jameson advocates a radical 'aesthetic of cognitive mapping', which would operate within the representational codes of the postmodern while reinvoking a quest for truth in cultural practice, a strategy for going beneath the surface of an ostensible irreality, This is not to argue that art should perform the function of science but, taking up Louis Althusser's Lacanian theory of ideology, art should be concerned with 'the representation of the subject's Imaginary relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence'.[43] How we are taught to imagine our personal relationship to a reality beyond immediate grasp and control is a site of struggle. Jameson wants the person to be oriented in social and global space more adequately than the systematic misrecognition fostered by 'the culture of the simulacrum'. This involves making sense of subject positioning and how it is articulated in relation to local, national and multinational power structures. It is a speculative idea and undoubtedly a tall order but one which I think can be illuminated by analysing Edge of Darkness.

A Postmodern Text?

What can be said about Edge of Darkness's cognitive effect must be hypothetical in the absence of systematic audience research. However, possible readings may be inferred from the evidence of the text itself. Also, it is important to appreciate that study of reception without enquiring into production is too limiting since, of necessity, certain material practices go into making a textual structure available for reading.[44] The specific qualities of Edge of Darkness can be clarified by considering the text itself and why and how it was made.

My purpose here is not simply to label Edge of Darkness as 'postmodern' and then to assert its cognitive effectivity but to account for its formal and ideological peculiarities. To emphasise ordinariness - to study mainstream programmes and the bits in between, to study how they are watched and how they shape and reproduce the conditions of everyday life - is crucial to making sense of the institution of broadcast television.[45] But Edge of Darkness is extra-ordinary. It is different and importantly so. Before public transmission it was previewed for the critics, many of whom insisted subsequently in their columns that viewers should not risk leaving their sets for a moment if they were to follow this baffling yet compelling serial. Edge of Darkness sought to engage viewers in the rapt attention of cinema-spectating, encoded at the beginning of each episode by tiny 'cinematic' titles near the bottom and edge of the screen. It defined itself as a programme for which to turn the living room lights down or off and to concentrate in, say, the way hired videos are watched; but with the added attraction of a story spun out across several weeks (or over three consecutive evenings, as in the case of the BBC1 repeat).

Edge of Darkness opens with an image of wire fencing; security guards come into view; the panning camera glimpses the words 'irradiated fuels'; it stops and dazzling floodlights are switched on; a train passes through a tunnel and into a freight yard siding - it is transporting nuclear waste containers. These images of obscure activities on a wet and gloomy night are accompanied by bluesy guitar music. Elsewhere, a plainclothes policeman is being persuaded to postpone his investigation into 'a so-called election fix' by a union official with a Yorkshire accent. Outside the hall where they are, a lorry passes by carrying a corrugated metal container similar to those on the train. An ominous-looking, rain-soaked man is standing in the bushes...watching. Later, he guns down the policeman's daughter Emma, as she and her father arrive home from a meeting where Labour politician Michael Meacher has been addressing students on the topic of 'the nuclear state'.

Initially, Ronnie Craven, the policeman, assumes that the intended victim was himself. His boss suspects the murderer to be someone seeking revenge for having been 'put away' by Craven in the past. But Craven is learning more about Emma's anti-nuclear politics and her membership of Gaia, an ecology group of scientists. Perhaps the killing was not a mistake. When Craven arrives in London to help with the murder enquiry he is approached by Pendleton, a 'cloak and dagger' man attached to the Cabinet Office. Pendleton remarks: 'Question is: were they after her or after you?'. The insinuation is that Craven himself might be implicated in Emma's alleged 'terrorism'. So, by the end of the first episode ('Compassionate Leave'), the signifiers of a noirish thriller and the enigmas of a murder plot with complicated political overtones are in play. In the following episodes Craven's quest for revenge/truth leads him into alliance with Darius Jedburgh, a renegade CIA agent, who brings comic relief to this deadly serious exploration of Britain's 'special relationship' with the USA, centred on 'plutonium madness' and its consequences for the human species and planet Earth, no less.[46]

This connection between a 'personal trouble' and as big a 'public issue'[47] as can be imagined is what makes Edge of Darkness so interesting. Of course, it is open to debate whether Edge of Darkness is significantly different from any of the other currently fashionable 'paranoia' thrillers - Dead Head, Frankie and Johnny, The Russian Soldier, Defence of the Realm. 'A bunker in every meadow, a tap on every phone: if the Special Branch don't get you, the radiation will', as Malcolm Imrie says disparagingly.[48] And, Judith Williamson is also unimpressed:

'State secrecy and nuclear operations are among the most frightening aspects of political life in Britain today. It is not surprising that they should provide fertile ground for political thrillers - like the BBC's immensely successful Edge of Darkness. But how "political" are these thrillers? The discovery of corruption in high places, by a reporter, private-eye or "good" policeman, is the classic formula of the thriller genre'.49

Edge of Darkness does deploy stock conventions of detection, espionage and adventure but, as Ruth Baumgarten notes, it 'combines the straightforward tensions of a thriller with a deeply emotional investigation into the nature of storytelling itself'.[50] Whether this problematises viewer response in a radical way can only be speculated upon with reference to the text and, to some extent, from what can be learnt about the production process. Commenting on the finished piece, script writer Troy Kennedy Martin complains:

'The film is made/told (as are most television thrillers) in the realistic style. But bubbling beneath the surface are all sorts of ideas and notions which defy the naturalistic mode so that they remain in the final cut invisible and difficult to detect'.51

Kennedy Martin had intended a mythic structure of archetypal figurations to underly the story: Ronnie Craven as the Celtic Green Man, who would actually

become a tree at the end; Jerry Grogan, President of the Kansas 'Fusion' Corporation, as a Knight Templar obsessed by the power of plutonium; and, Darius Jedburgh as a Teutonic Knight struggling against 'the dark forces who would rule this planet'. It is true that this is only hinted at in the final text. While sympathetic to Kennedy Martin's 'allegorical' approach, Michael Wearing says that he and Martin Campbell 'were still dealing with naturalistic problems' of producing a coherent narrative and not just a sequence of brilliant but disconnected images and perhaps mystical ideas. For example, at the time when Kennedy Martin had supplied only the first two scripts, it was difficult for them to appreciate his explanation for why Craven should eventually turn into a tree. Afterwards, Campbell and Wearing admitted that it would have made sense, connecting the Green Man archetype with Craven's embrace of Emma's belief in Gaia the Earth Goddess and the ecological theme of humanity's ultimate subordination to nature. However, in my view, the tension between 'the authors', which seems to have been constructive rather than destructive anyway, is less important than the resolutions achieved in the text, especially in the way it hovers between realism and modernism. One of the reasons why I want to suggest that Edge of Darkness is postmodernist stylistically is to do with how it moves to and fro between the logic of realism/naturalism and a kind of modernist reflexivity.

The enigma of Emma's death and what she represents is introduced imagistically when Craven visits her bedroom shortly after the murder. We see chimes, posters (feminism, Marxism, pacifism), toys (clown, rag doll, teddy bear), science textbooks, clothes (which he smells) and a record player. In a drawer, concealed by Emma's underwear, he finds a file box covered in pink, patterned paper with 'Gaia' written on it, containing a geiger counter, her passport, a vibrator that he kisses and a revolver. Craven is carrying a shotgun himself. He plays the record that Emma has left on the turntable: 'It was the time of the preacher when the story began...in the year of 01...the choice of a lady and the love of a man...'.[52] The scene concludes with Craven lying on Emma's bed holding her teddy bear against his breast and her revolver resting on his groin. These are not just free-floating signifiers but the remaining fragments of a person's life. They gesture out towards invisible complexities that are unravelled in the subsequent episodes.

Commenting on the first episode, the Guardian critic Hugh Hebert remarked:

> 'All the whispers about the series have been that it will be epoch-making and so, eventually, it may be. What we actually saw on the screen last night, though, was the biggest collection of thriller cliches and Trendy Thoughts for the Day you could sweep off a committee room floor'.53

Perhaps it is impossible to avoid what some may consider 'cliches' and 'trendy thoughts' when serious emotional and political issues are addressed in a cynical

postmodern world. According to Jean-Francois Lyotard, the purpose of modern art and of a radical postmodernism is 'to present the fact that the unpresentable exists'.[54] In Edge of Darkness Craven's quest is punctuated by visitations from his dead daughter. These apparent hallucinations are interwoven with flashbacks recalling the death of Craven's wife from cancer ten years before and his near incestuous relationship with Emma dating from that period. Occasionally, we/Craven only hear her voice; more often we actually see Emma emerging from, say, the shadows under a tree. The oscillations between a naturalistic present, an expressionistic past and Emma's 'ghostly' returns are handled deftly, to say the least. These visual representations of Craven's grief-stricken obsession with Emma become supernatural interventions or surreal eruptions in what was hitherto a realistically plausible story. She begins to tell him what to do; she gives him clues about what is going on at the Northmoor reprocessing plant; she tells him why he should not remain vengeful on the brink of death because others will continue their mission and the Earth will defend itself. In short, Emma becomes the narrative agent, structuring Craven's actions. It is rather as though the Earth Goddess is pushing Man around.

On this question of the relation between the causal logic of naturalism/realism and atemporal interruption, the scene in the Northmoor mine when Craven and Jedburgh come across a repository of bourgeois culture is especially worth noting. This occurs in the penultimate episode just before they reach the 'hot cell' where the plutonium is stored. Jedburgh calls it 'a Doomsday equivalent of Harrods', and it is surely that. It contains racks of claret, choice foods, bottles of malt whisky, in addition to valuable 'old masters', an old sports car and several other artefacts redolent of leisured wealth. As 'the sound of Mozart percolates the cabin' (script), Craven surveys the hidden treasures and the gastronomic Jedburgh prepares them a candlelit lunch. The scene is excessive, breaking the naturalistic bounds of plausibility, although it is motivated minimally by a sign which they read as indicating that the bolt hole was established in response to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis - 'Lot of people got shit scared that year'. In spite of its lack of 'realism', this scene signifies the reality that the rich are prepared to survive through a nuclear holocaust.

Craven's and Jedburgh's brief respite 'on the floor of Plato's cave' is intercut with the testimony of Harcourt, Pendleton's colleague, at the House of Commons Energy Committee enquiry into Northmoor. Harcourt informs the politicians that Grogan wants to buy Robert Bennett's British company International Irradiated Fuels because it is manufacturing plutonium illegally at the plant. Ostensibly, Craven and Jedburgh have been sent into Northmoor by their respective governments

to frustrate the deal between Bennett and Grogan. Jedburgh, who has been ordered to 'get into the Ball park and steal the ball', seems unawares that he is, in fact, through the mediation of his political masters, acting on behalf of Grogan, who expects the Energy Committee to stop the deal. Nor does Craven know that the British Minister responsible has actually sanctioned IIF's 'experimental' manufacture of plutonium at Northmoor. In effect, both Craven and Jedburgh are pawns in a secret, convoluted game being played by the British and United States governments.

Mapping the Depths

Edge of Darkness goes well and truly 'over the top' as it moves from a murder mystery with sinister political implications towards its climax as adventure fantasy and wild philosophical speculation. On their way to the hot cell Craven and Jedburgh find the dead bodies of the Gaia team, all of whom apart from Emma were drowned when they attempted to discover the dark secrets under Northmoor. As Jedburgh steals the plutonium, Craven has a gunfight with Bennett's heavies. And, when it seems certain that they will get him, he finds an old telephone link with No 10...and Pendleton. Meanwhile, Jedburgh makes off with the plutonium in a Harrods bag, killing four of his fellow CIA agents on the way to Scotland and a showdown with Grogan at the NATO 'High Frontier' Conference in the Gleneagles Hotel. This is a convenient location since it enables him to play a last game of his beloved golf. For both Jedburgh and Craven are dying of radiation sickness - 'to know is to die'. Craven finds himself in an American Airforce base hospital where he is visited by Pendleton, seeking to find out what has happened to the plutonium, and by Emma, who brings him a black flower, symbol of the Earth's revenge against human exploitation of natural resources. Clemmie, Gaia's emissary, helps Craven to escape from the hospital. He sets off for Scotland to find Jedburgh. At the Conference, Jedburgh denounces Grogan's scheme to waste the planet and leave it behind:

'Jerry Grogan suggests that in a hundred years from now the human race will leave the planet and move into space. Now Jerry is a hell of a salesman. He has the gift of making such an unappetising idea sound attractive. Now, the way Jerry tells it, it sounds like an extension of the old Oregon Trail. It calls for the same "American" virtues; self reliance, independence, know how. But it's not going to be that way. This new international nuclear state that Jerry's a part of - they do not cherish such virtues - you got that straight from the horse's mouth because I used to be part of it. Read between the lines of a Jerry Grogan speech and you will find not the Frontiersman but the Teutonic Knight. Not democracy but a despotism. This future nuclear state whose authority will derive not from the people but from the possession of plutonium. And just to make sure we all know what we're talking about, here I brought some of the stuff along with me today'.55

Bringing two bars of plutonium out of his bag, Jedburgh sends the delegates hurtling from the Conference chamber and then he irradiates Grogan.

On instructions from the Minister, Harcourt gives Craven the task of getting the plutonium back from Jedburgh. When Craven finds him, Jedburgh explains why he has placed the plutonium in an explosive configuration in Loch Lednock: '...that's the problem with plutonium, Craven. It's limited in its application. It is not user friendly. But as a vehicle for regaining one's self-respect, it's got a lot going for it'.

Craven remarks that it is 'rather hard on the rest of Scotland'. Jedburgh agrees: 'especially the golf courses'. Craven closes the circle by phoning the information through to the enemy.

That evening, as Harcourt and Pendleton dine with their erstwhile foes, Bennett and Grogan, Craven and Jedburgh sit waiting for the SAS to come and put them out of their misery. This is the occasion for a concluding debate on 'the confrontation between good and evil' and whether Man (Jedburgh) or the Earth (Craven) will eventually win. Jedburgh is killed by Nallers, 'the State Executioner', but Craven is spared - 'You're on our side'/'I am not on your side'. The following morning IIF retrieve the plutonium for the Fusion Corporation as black flowers begin to grow on the hillside where Craven should have turned into a tree.

Fantastic! A good yarn? Yes. But more. As well as going over the top, Edge of Darkness also goes beneath the surface to explore complex psychic and political depths. A psychoanalytic account of it would be interesting. However, I don't want to offer one here. Instead, I want to consider the question of cognitive mapping. To quote Jameson again:

'An aesthetic of cognitive mapping - a pedagogic political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system - will necessarily have to respect this now enormously complex representational dialectic and to invent radically new forms to do it justice. This is not, then, clearly a call for a return to some older kind of machinery, some older and more transparent national space, or some more traditional and reassuring perspectival or mimetic enclave: the new political art - if it is indeed possible at all - will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is, to say, to its fundamental object - the world space of multinational capital - at the same time at which it achieves a beakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again be able to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion. The political form of postmodernism, if there is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale'.56

Jameson's sketch of a political postmodernism is more than the prescription for a particular kind of text - a text neither realist nor modernist which

mobilises diverse representational discourses to produce maps that enable readers to make better sense of their positioning in society and the world. Of necessity, it must engage in institutional struggle locally and internationally, not just nationally, especially around the control of 'audio-visual space'.[57] But I do wish to relate the idea of cognitive mapping specifically to Edge of Darkness, if only to begin thinking about such an aesthetic.

Taking Ronnie Craven to be the key identificatory figure and assuming that he bears the hermeneutic code[58] of the narrative, we are called upon to make an imaginary journey beyond the response to a terrible bereavement in Yorkshire through the appalling machinations of the British State and its complicit subordination to US economic, military and political hegemony, the consequences of which are already ecologically and humanly devastating. Does this produce 'a sense of helplessness beneath a vast, impersonal and uncontrollable force'[59] or do we learn something about what is happening behind our backs that might be of some small contribution to resisting that crazy system? Craven is relentless in pursuit for knowledge of why his daughter died the way she did. Finally, this leads him to a choice which is no more than a gesture of good will towards our common natural condition - 'I'm on the side of the planet'.

There is in Edge of Darkness a mapping motif. With a list of London Underground stations and help from people inside the system, Craven breaks into the MI5 computer. There he confirms that Bennett was responsible for Emma's murder and he takes away with him the 'Plan of IIF Facilities at Northmoor'.[60] The computer building is represented fictionally as adjoining the Barbican Theatre, a thoroughly postmodern conceit. When Craven and Jedburgh later go beneath the surface, both diagetically and metaphorically, into the Northmoor mine they are guided by the corrupt union official James Godbolt and his one hundred year old linen map of its labrynthine passages.

How cognition works in relation to the story's discursive process is, of course, the crucial issue. It is vitally important to situate the text, any text, in its contexts of consumption as well as production in order to analyse the knowledge and understanding that it might or might not generate.[61]

Troy Kennedy Martin's 'back story' is instructive about the cognitive intent and broad production context behind Edge of Darkness.[62] It contains some factual and some fictional elements, beginning in the 1960s when Britain was already on the way to becoming a 'plutonium state' with its reprocessing plant at Windscale (now Sellafield). In the late-1970s, President Carter decided to stop plutonium manufacture outside the USA. To this end, he sent Darius Jedburgh to London to subvert the British nuclear establishment.

Jedburgh, himself, organised an anti-nuclear group of scientists, Gaia. However, in 1979 Carter backtracked on his earlier policy and Jedburgh was ordered to disband the organisation that he had created. This was not possible because by then the organisation had gathered its own momentum. Gaia went underground.

By 1983 Reagan was in the White House and announcing his Strategic Defence Initiative. At that time, Jerry Grogan of the Kansas Fusion Corporation decided to produce a nuclear pump for a 'Star Wars' laser gun. The Federal Government refuse to help Grogan with this project because they don't trust him. In response Grogan goes it alone by trying to acquire the British company IIF, which is manufacturing plutonium secretly. Suspicious about what is happening at Northmoor, Gaia sends six young scientists into the reprocessing plant to investigate. The security staff there flood the passages. Only Emma Craven escapes.

According to Kennedy Martin, the back story is founded in 'three separate notions'. First, James Lovelock's Gaia theory of the Earth as a self-regulating cybernetic system.[63] Second, the High Frontier concept expounded by General Abraham and Doctor Edward Teller, which Reagan adopted in a characteristically light-headed moment.[64] Third, the critiques of State secrecy and the nuclear industry in Britain.[65]

In a sense, the back story as it moves into the actual story told by Edge of Darkness is an historically grounded 'what if?': what if someone not predisposed to radical thinking and political practice becomes enmeshed in this complex web of intrigue and power?[66] How the speculative, though not wholly fanciful, themes are woven into an engaging fiction has already been discussed. How that fiction makes sense to television-viewers who are intermittently and partially informed about the risks of nuclear power (leaks from Sellafield and so on), what is done in the name of 'deterrence' (actions against the Greenham Peace Camp and so on), what happens to 'whistle blowers' (John Berry, Sarah Tisdall and so on) is, frankly, anybody's guess. Some viewers may be people who have personal experiences that are confirmed by Edge of Darkness. Many, I suspect, will have a sense of what is going on above their heads and behind closed doors that could lead them to believe that it is not so fanciful after all. I doubt that Edge of Darkness has been read as contributing to the formation of 'a new ethic' of human responsibility and respect for life on this planet. But I do think it is a modest yet heartening reply to 'the heavy dancers'[67] who tell us lies while preparing us for the final solution.

Acknowledgements

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Notes and References

1. From an interview that Andy Baker and I conducted with Martin Campbell and Michael Wearing in March 1986.
2. Apparently, Michael Grade, controller of BBC1, was so enthusiastic about Edge of Darkness that, initially, he wanted to repeat each episode on Saturday evenings following the BBC2 transmission.
3. BBC Broadcasting Research gave an appreciation index (AI) of 82 for the first transmission of the serial as a whole (the average for drama is 75). Episode 5 'Northmoor' achieved an AI of 86.
4. Hugh Hebert conducted an abusive campaign against Edge of Darkness in his Guardian column.
5. See, for example, John Caughie's discussion of this in 'Progressive Television and Documentary Drama', Screen vol.21 no.3 (1980).
6. See Graham Murdock: 'Authorship and Organisation', Screen Education no.35 (1980); and Carl Gardner & John Wyver: 'The Single Play', Edinburgh International Television Festival 1980 Programme - this is reprinted with an afterword in Screen vol.24 nos.4-5 (1983).
7. See, for instance, 'The Days of Hope Debate' in Tony Bennett et al(eds): Popular Television and Film (BFI 1981).
8. In their book on Trevor Griffiths, Powerplays (BFI 1984), Mike Poole and John Wyver take the development of his work to exemplify an apparent decline in oppositional television drama since the advent of the Thatcher government in 1979.
9. See John McGrath: 'Strike at the Fiction-Factories', Edinburgh International Television Festival 1985 Programme.
10. Troy Kennedy Martin: 'Nats Go Home', Encore no.48 vol.11 no.2 (1964).
11. J.McGrath: 'TV Drama -The Case Against Naturalism', Sight and Sound vol.46 no.2 (1977).
12. Roger Hudson: 'Television in Britain -Description and Dissent', Theatre Quarterly vol.11 no.6 (1972).
13. It is interesting to note that debates on progressive form so often terminate with a discussion of The Cheviot... and that none of McGrath's subsequent television work (e.g. the 1980 Adventures of Frank) has been judged to fulfil the promise that it represented.
14. Colin MacCabe: 'Realism and the Cinema -Notes on Some Brechtian Theses', Screen vol.15 no.2 (1974). Also, see his attack on Days of Hope in Bennett(op.cit.).
15. The example given in 'Realism and the Cinema'. MacCabe took his argument further in 'The Politics of Separation', Screen vol.16 no.4 (1975/76) and in 'Theory and Film', Screen vol.17 no.3 (1976).
16. Raymond Williams: 'A Lecture on Realism', Screen vol.18 no.1 (1977).
17. See 'Countering Consent -An Interview With John Wyver' in Frank Pike(ed): Ah! Mischief -The Writer and Television (Faber 1982).
18. See J.McGrath: A Good Night Out (Methuen 1981).
19. See Colin McArthur's analysis of The Cheviot... in ch.10 of his Television

and History (BFI 1978).

20. See ch.5 of Terry Lovell's Pictures of Reality (BFI 1980).
21. Both Dennis Potter and Raymond Williams delivered papers entitled 'Realism and Non-Naturalism' at the Festival.
22. Richard Dyer, Terry Lovell & Jean McCrindle: 'Soap Opera & Women', Edinburgh International Television Festival 1977 Programme p24.
23. Ibid. p26.
24. Of the subsequent work around this issue especially important is Charlotte Brunsdon's discussion of 'competencies' in 'Crossroads -Notes on Soap Opera', Screen vol.22 no.4 (1982), reprinted in E.Ann Kaplan(ed): Regarding Television (American Film Institute 1983).
25. See the book that later explored these issues in detail, R.Dyer et al: Coronation Street (BFI 1981). Also, Dorothy Hobson's study, Crossroads -The Drama of a Soap Opera (Methuen 1982), includes ethnographic audience research.
26. In the sense used by Jean-Francois Lyotard in The Postmodern Condition -A Report on Knowledge (University of Minnesota 1984).
27. See Krishan Kumar: Prophecy and Progess (Penguin 1978) for a survey of this theorising.
28. See Hal Foster(ed): Postmodern Culture (Bay Press 1983, Pluto 1985) for a collection of sociological and culturalogical essays on postmodernism from the left.
29. Raymond Williams: Towards 2000 (Penguin 1985).
30. Fredric Jameson: 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', New Left Review no.146 (1984) p57.
31. Ernest Mandel: Late Capitalism (New Left Books 1975).
32. Jameson (op.cit.) p58
33. Ibid. p54.
34. John Wyver: 'Television and Postmodernism' in Lisa Apignanesi(ed): Postmodernism (ICA 1986) pp52-53.
35. Umberto Eco: 'A Guide to the Neo-Television of the 1980s', Framework no.25 (1985) p19.
36. Ibid. p25.
37. Jameson (op.cit.) pp61-62.
38. See Jameson's 'Pleasure -A Political Issue' in Formations of Pleasure (RKP 1983).
39. Dick Hebdige: 'The Bottom Line on Planet One', Ten:8 no.19 (1985) p41.
40. Ibid. p48.
41. Jameson (1984, op cit.) p85.
42. Ibid. p89.
43. Louis Althusser: 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in his Lenin and Philosophy (New Left Books 1971).
44. See Murdock (op.cit.).
45. See John Ellis: Visible Fictions (RKP 1983).
46. The production of Edge of Darkness was 'co-financed' by the US company Lionheart (£400,000 out of a total budget of two million), who sought no editorial control, but thus acquired the right to sell it throughout North and South America. The casting of the Hollywood actor Joe Don Baker as Jedburgh is obviously an important aspect of the programme's potential

in the US market. Although Edge of Darkness does seem to have an organically transatlantic quality, as Michael Wearing pointed out, US distribution was hardly considered at all in its making.

47. C.Wright Mills: The Sociological Imagination (Penguin 1970).

48. Malcolm Imrie: 'Played Out', The Listener (6 March 1986).

49. Judith Williamson: 'The Lust for Truth and the Secret State', New Socialist (February 1986).

50. Ruth Baumgarten: 'Nukes and Spooks', The Listener (31 October 1986).

51. I am grateful to Martin Campbell and Michael Wearing for letting me have a copy of Troy Kennedy Martin's post-production commentary on Edge of Darkness, from which this quotation is taken.

52. Willie Nelson's 'The Time of the Preacher' (1984).

53. Hugh Hebert: 'Portion of Low Fibre Serial', The Guardian (5 November 1985).

54. Lyotard (op.cit.) p78.

55. Episode 6: 'Fusion'.

56. Jameson (1984, op.cit.) p92.

57. Armand Mattelart, Xavier Delcourt & Michelle Mattelart: International Image Markets (Comedia 1984).

58. Roland Barthes: S/Z (Cape 1975).

59. Williams (1985, op.cit.) p221.

60. Episode 4: 'Breakthrough'.

61. See, for example, Annette Kuhn's 'Women's Genres' in Screen vol.25 no.1 (1984). It is my view, however, that the recent emphasis on the text/audience context relation tends to shift attention too much away from the study of production contexts.

62. Again, this information comes from Troy Kennedy Martin's commentary on the finished piece.

63. James Lovelock: Gaia -A New Look at Life on the Planet (Oxford University Press, in paperback 1986). Lovelock complained about the misrepresentation of his theory in Edge of Darkness and for the left-wing inflection that it was given. However, Kennedy Martin was quite consciously making an imaginative extrapolation from the theory when he devised the theme of the Earth taking revenge and its significance for oppositional politics.

64. See E.P.Thompson(ed): Star Wars (Penguin 1985).

65. See, for example, Crispin Aubrey: Who's Watching You? (Penguin 1981).

66. In that sense Edge of Darkness functions similarly to The Big Flame (1969), discussed by Raymond Williams in his 'Lecture on Realism' (1977, op.cit.).

67. 'The heavy dancers are the image-conscious public persons who crowd the media of the world, "summoning up the ancient spirits of the tribe as they prepare for the ultimate war". The more that they prepare for war, the more anxious they are to come before the public and assure it that they are devoted to the cause of peace'. -E.P.Thompson: The Heavy Dancers (Merlin 1985) pvii.

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